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ABSTRACT

A total of 78 Mexican-American and 14 Anglo-American children participated in a study to determine the relationship of oral English proficiency, social acceptance, and academic achievement among fifth grade students. The students were administered measures of phonology and verbal expression. Scores from a standardized achievement test were used to determine academic achievement. To discover social approval scores, the students were given a sheet listing all class members and were asked to rank them in terms of whom they would choose to spend time with. The findings suggested that social approval and level of English proficiency were not related, nor were they affected by ethnicity. However, a significant relationship was found between phonology/verbal expression and scholastic achievement. (FL)

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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY
AND SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE, AND SCHOLASTIC ACHIEVEMENT
AMONG MEXICAN-AMERICAN AND ANGLO-AMERICAN
FIFTH GRADE CHILDREN

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Need for Research

Language has become one of the most controversial factors in education today. Many educators feel that regional and social dialects have no effect on scholastic achievement and that divergent speech is unacceptable only to prejudiced people outside the speech community. There is a feeling among some educators that all dialects and accents should be preserved intact. Others feel that a standard form of the English language is the underlying success factor to literacy skills and social mobility. In South Texas where speech patterns run the gamut from non-English speaking to fluent native English, it is essential that some level of significance be established for the role of language in terms of socialization patterns and scholastic achievement.

The Problem

Do significant correlations exist between English proficiency of fifth grade children, their social acceptance, and their scholastic achievement? If it were found that there was a consistently high correlation between these three factors, then it could be generalized that English proficiency has some effect on

social acceptance and scholastic achievement. It is expected that if significant relationships exist between socialization patterns and academic achievement and English proficiency, there would be important implications for teacher education.

Procedure and Data Analysis

The design of this study was formulated to determine the relationship between oral English proficiency and social acceptance among fifth grade children. The investigators believe that children who do not enjoy a satisfactory level of social status among their peers are not only inhibited socially, but academically as well. Therefore, the design of the study was extended to determine the validity of this belief by correlating academic achievement scores along with the oral language and social status scores.

The variable of ethnicity was an integral factor in the study, as one primary purpose was to seek indications which might lead to assumptions that significant social values are placed by children on quality and quantity of English language production. There would be strong implications for teaching integrated classes should it be found that these values placed on language vary between Mexican-American and Anglo-American youngsters.

The variable of sex was also considered because the socially desirable peer may be perceived differently by boys and girls from different ethnic groups.

The teacher variable was controlled in part by the fact that all children tested had been exposed to at least five different teachers. The teacher variable is not considered to be a strong factor in this study because many factors, such as good will toward a second language in the home, social and emotional problems, attitudes toward the target language are factors which are impossible to control.

Covariables such as age, intelligence, and socioeconomic status were not included in the analyses because the emphasis rested with oral language production per se and sociogram data.

Description of the Sample

Children from four fifth-grade classrooms in the Edinburg Consolidated Independent School District (ECISD) were selected for the study. The ratio of Mexican-American children to Anglo-American children attending school in this district is approximately 80-20, respectively. Selection of groups with evenly divided Mexican-American and Anglo-American students was impossible as integration patterns follow HEW guidelines which require a classroom balance to reflect the total school population.

As this district groups children according to ability, the classrooms selected in each case were top sections as designated by the school principal. It was thought that by this procedure, many influences beyond the control of the investigators would be minimized, such as repeated academic failures, severe language

handicaps, and probably low-low socioeconomic factors, and excessive absences from school.

Fifth-grade students were selected because they had had five years in which to develop independent social attachments, preferences, prejudices and patterns of interaction with each other. The total sample consisted of 92 students, 78 Mexican-Americans and 14 Anglo-Americans.

Instruments Used

Phonology: In order to assess mastery of English phonemes a sentence repetition test was constructed which included 45 English sounds. A large picture of a school cafeteria scene was selected and the sentences were closely related to the picture content. By using the picture, speech production was facilitated, in that the sentences were contextualized. The picture tended to take the children's mind off conscious language resulting in answers in their natural language. In this regard, most writers have scrupulously avoided asking children to mimic words in isolation to test for phonology, for fear that immediate imitation might occur which would fail to reveal habitual faulty sounds.¹

The seven sentences in the test have 175 sounds which give a comprehensive coverage of English phonemes. The task of the subject was to repeat the modeled sentence as nearly as possible. Consonant blends were considered a scoreable item also because they represent a sizable number of deviations from English by children

¹Dorothea McCarthy, "Language Development in Children," A Manual of Child Psychology, Leonard Carmichael, ed. (2d, New York: Wiley, 1954) pp. 492-630.

whose first language is Spanish.

Each subject was tested individually and his responses recorded on tape. A panel of three scorers listened simultaneously to each tape, and derived a raw score by subtracting the agreed upon deviations from the total number of sounds possible.

Sentence Repetition Test

1. Th u ch i l d r e n l i k e t o e a t l u n c h.
(The children like to eat lunch.)
2. Th u t r a y z h a v e g o o d t h i n g z t o e a t.
(The trays have good things to eat.)
3. M i z i z F a w s t e r k n o w z h o w t o f i x t h u t r a y z.
(Mrs. Foster knows how to fix the trays.)
4. B a r b r u s m i l z w h i l e s h e w a i t s h e r t u r n.
(Barbara smiles while she waits her turn.)
5. B o b i z t a k i n g t h u f u d g e c o o k i e q u i e t l y.
(Bob is taking the fudge cookie quietly.)
6. J i m s a w y u m m y p o t a t o z f o r l u n c h.
(Jim say yummy potatoes for lunch.)
7. Th u b o y z w i l l g e t p l e z h e r o u t o v e a t i n g.
(The boys will get pleasure out of eating.)

Name _____ Class _____ Score _____

Fluency: Phonology alone was not considered sufficient to constitute a general measure to total language. For this reason the investigators selected the Verbal Expression sub-test of the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistics Abilities (ITPA).

While this test is primarily diagnostic and standardized for children between the ages of three and ten, it nevertheless provided a common stimulus for verbal expression and, at the same time,

Verbal Expression

School _____

Name _____

Class _____

Demonstration

- Nail
- | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Label | 4. Composition | 7. Numerosity |
| 2. Color | 5. Function | 8. Other Characteristics |
| 3. Shape | 6. Major Parts | 9. Comparison |
| 10. Person, Place or Thing | | |

Ball _____Block _____Envelope _____Button _____Item Scores

<u>Ball</u>	<u>Block</u>	<u>Envelope</u>	<u>Button</u>	<u>Total</u>
+	+	+	=	
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Academic Achievement: Scores were taken from each student's permanent record folder. These scores on Reading, Math, and Language were generated by the administration of the California Achievement Test, Level II (CAT).

Social Status: This variable was obtained by administering a sociogram which yielded a social-approval score for each child. The children were given a sheet listing all members of the class and were asked to rank each of their classmates on a continuum from 1 to 5 (5 being first choice and 1 being last choice) in terms of who they would rather spend their time with. Each child's score of social acceptance was determined by adding each rank he was given. They were also asked to indicate the number which they thought most of their classmates would give to them on the back of the sheet. This resulted in a self-score. In addition, each child's list of names was tabulated to determine how many points he had given away.

Findings

The problem which was explored in this study dealt with the relationship between the following measures: ethnicity, sex, verbal expression as measured by the Verbal Expression sub-test of ITPA, phonology, as measured by the California Achievement Test, Level III, the amount of approval received as measured by a sociogram, the amount of approval felt by individual students, and the amount of approval given away as measured by the sociogram. Statistical analysis - Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient.

Alpha = .05

N = 92

df = 90

Test of significance - t test

Assumptions - bivariate normal distribution

Decisions - only Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficients

$r > .30$ are interpreted for a functional or practical reason, however,

$r < .30$ are statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence.

The functional or practical reason for interpreting only correlation coefficients greater than .30 is because that for correlation coefficients less than .30, less than 9% of the bivariate distribution is overlapping.

Hypotheses 1: There will be no significant relationship between social acceptance and English proficiency.

TABLE I
Correlations of Language and Social Acceptance

	<u>Verbal Expression</u> <u>Social Acceptance</u>	<u>Phonology</u> <u>Social Acceptance</u>
All Subjects	.1607	.1046
Total Mexican-American	.1002	.0413
Total Anglo-American	.0734	.0470

As can be seen in Table I, there was no significant relationship between language and social acceptance among any of the three groups.

When one classroom of total Mexican-American population was

compared with a mixed group of Mexican-Americans and Anglo-Americans there was no significant difference in the correlations of the two groups.

TABLE II

Comparison of Total Mexican-Americans and Integrated Classrooms

	<u>Room A</u>	<u>Room B</u>
	<u>Mexican-Americans</u>	<u>Mexican-Americans and Anglo-Americans</u>
Phonology/Social Acceptance	.2090	.1043
Verbal Expression and Social Acceptance	.2554	.0429

Based on these data, the first null hypothesis of this study must be accepted.

Hypothesis 2: There will be no significant relationship between scholastic achievement as determined by the achievement test scores on the CAT and English proficiency as measured by the sentence repetition test and the Verbal-Expression sub-test of ITPA.

TABLE III

Total Population of Mexican-Americans and Anglo-Americans Tested

	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Math</u>	<u>Language</u>	<u>Phonology</u>	<u>Verbal Expression</u>
Reading	1.000				
Math	.7580	1.000			
Language	.5791	.4334	1.000		
Phonology	.4395	.2435	.3482	1.000	
Verbal Expression	.3283	.2705	.3802	.2928	1.000

As can be seen in Table III a significant correlation exists between scholastic achievement (Reading, Math, Language Mechanics) and language (Phonology and Verbal Expression). Similar significant relationships existed when the total population was broken down by ethnic groups (Table IV and Table V).

TABLE IV

Total Mexican-Americans Tested

	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Math</u>	<u>Language</u>	<u>Phonology</u>	<u>Verbal Expression</u>
Reading	1.000				
Math	.7580	1.000			
Language	.5791	.4334	1.000		
Phonology	.4395	.2435	.3482	1.000	
Verbal Expression	.3283	.2705	.3802	.2928	1.000

TABLE V

Total Anglo-Americans Tested

	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Math</u>	<u>Language</u>	<u>Phonology</u>	<u>Verbal Expression</u>
Reading	1.000				
Math	.7490	1.000			
Language	.8824	.7064	1.000		
Phonology	.6724	.4488	.5101	1.000	
Verbal Expression	.1740	.2703	.0200	.4585	1.000

TABLE VI

	<u>Total Population Tested</u>		
	<u>Soc. Accept. and Reading</u>	<u>Soc. Accept. and Math</u>	<u>Soc. Accept. and Language</u>
Total Population Tested	.1525	.1293	.0275
Total Mexican-Americans Tested	.1145	.0889	.0667
Total Anglo-Americans Tested	.1268	-.0651	.3438

As can be seen in Table VI, only among the Anglo-Americans tested was there a significant relationship between Social Acceptance and Language Mechanics. This relationship does not appear to have any bearing on the study, therefore this null hypothesis is accepted.

Although this study was basically concerned with the above three hypotheses, other relationships were noted which warrant attention. In looking at the variables in isolation it was found that ethnicity was significantly related to verbal expression ($r=.42$) and phonology ($r=.38$) at the .05 level of confidence with Anglo-Americans scoring significantly higher than Mexican-Americans.

When correlating sex with the other variables, significant relationships were found to exist with phonology (.33) and language achievement (.35) with females scoring significantly higher than males in both phonology and language achievement. Additionally, there is a significant (.05) relationship between sex and felt acceptance from the group ($r=.31$) with females indicating feelings of receiving

significantly less acceptance or approval from the group than males.

Looking at phonology, it was found that this variable correlated with reading achievement ($r=.32$) and language achievement ($r=.43$) significantly. A significant inverse relationship ($r=.34$) was obtained between phonology and the individual's feeling of felt acceptance or approval from the group.

The relationship between the amount of approval received and the amount of approval given away ($r=.52$) is significant at the .05 level of confidence. One can conclude that those who give more approval and acceptance receive more approval and acceptance.

CONCLUSIONS

From the findings it appears that social approval and the level of English proficiency are not related, nor are they affected by ethnicity among school age children. While verbal social classes tend to develop rigid boundaries among adults, this apparently is not the case with young children, who seemingly do not value English production as a determinant for interpersonal relationships. If educators view preparation for adulthood as an educational objective, then time would be well spent in orienting young children to the value of fluent speech in order to help bridge the gap between two diverse value systems (adults and child) regarding language.

However, as a significant relationship was found to exist between phonology/verbal expression and scholastic achievement (Reading, Math, and Language) it would seem that continuous modeling and strong emphasis on classroom production is further warranted. While a teacher should

be vitally concerned with ever-increasing standards of English production in the classroom, she need not show concern for language deviation on the playground in terms of social ostracization of the less facile speaker of English.

It is interesting to note that the inverse correlation between phonology and felt acceptance among the total Mexican-American population is significant. This might indicate that social rejection could occur to those whose English more nearly approximated that of the native speaker. However, although not significant, the same phenomenon occurred in the same direction among the total Anglo-American population. This seems to suggest that in the training of teachers for kindergarten and primary grades, a concern for the integrity of language, English or Spanish, should be communicated to children. Attitudes toward educated language needs to be examined in terms of the effective as much as, or more than, the production of language for purely communicative purposes. This conclusion, as well as the preceding one, places a great deal of responsibility on teachers to motivate children to learn language and to learn it well. It also places a greater responsibility on the teacher training institutions to train teachers to be good models of language and include competency-based courses in English Language proficiency as well as technique in teaching English as a second language as part of the requirements for a degree in education from Pan American University. The teacher-training institutions might do well to enhance a respect for the beauty and consistency of language per se, whether it be English or Spanish.

Further investigation of the data revealed that for the total Anglo-American population a significant relationship exists between sex and points received from the sociogram ($r=.74$) as well as sex and felt approval ($r=.63$). This indicates that while the Anglo-American girls felt that they would not be readily chosen by others in the classroom, in actuality girls received more approval than boys. While the females's self concept dictated how they felt about themselves, the actual choices contradicted what the females anticipated.

Although not significant, it is interesting as well as important to note that for the total Mexican-American group, the females felt (as the Anglo-American females did) that they would not receive much social approval from their classmates. Their anticipated lack of social approval was verified. These observations can possibly be attributed to not only the natural modesty which young females normally exhibit at their age, but also indicates possible influence of sex roles as exemplified in our country's social and cultural patterns.

In addition the possibility exists that the differences in social approval of Anglo-American girls versus Mexican-American girls exist because of cultural differences. This would seem to support current efforts to educate prospective teachers in the area of bi-cultural differences and similarities that will be encountered in the classroom and provide a basis for affective decision making as it relates to the classroom.

The relationship between the amount of approval received and the amount of approval given away (.52) is significant at the .05 level of confidence. One can conclude that those that give more approval and acceptance also receive more approval and acceptance.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although there were significant findings in this study, many questions were not answered conclusively. The small Anglo-American population available seriously limited the study in terms of comparing differences among ethnic groups and between homogeneous and heterogeneous classrooms in terms of ethnicity.

The study was further limited by the fact that no oral language proficiency test has yet been developed and standardized which could serve the needs of investigations dealing with language production.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This study should be duplicated using equal members of Mexican-Americans and Anglo-Americans if such classes can be found in Valley schools and comparisons made between them on the variables used in this study.

Work should be done toward developing an efficient oral English proficiency test which would receive nationwide demand.

Longitudinal studies should be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness on scholastic achievement, English proficiency, and social integration patterns of bilingual programs.

a consistent scoring system which eliminated administrator differences. Test items on this sub-test required the subject to describe a ball, nail, envelope, block and button. Points were given for ten categories of speech and conceptualization. The following work sheet was used in collecting this data, and each test was administered individually.